

Iron Age Gate and Fortifications Uncovered at Philistine Gath

Bible and archaeology news

Robin Ngo • 08/10/2015



Remains of the monumental city gate and fortifications of Iron Age Gath—home of the Biblical giant Goliath—were uncovered this summer in excavations at Tell es-Safi in central Israel. *Photo: Prof. Aren Maeir, Director, Ackerman Family Bar-Ilan University Expedition to Gath.*

In the Bible, Gath was one of the five Philistine cities (“the Pentapolis”) established in Canaan and home to the giant Goliath, who famously fought David (I Samuel 17). The site of Tell es-Safi, located on the border between the southern coastal plain (Philistia) and the Judean foothills (Shephelah) in central Israel, has been identified by most scholars with Biblical Gath. There, archaeologists uncovered evidence of continuous occupation from the Chalcolithic period (fifth millennium B.C.E.) until modern times—including evidence of Philistine occupation in the Iron Age. Recently, [the Ackerman Family Bar-Ilan University Expedition to Gath](#), led by Bar-Ilan University archaeology professor Aren Maeir, announced that the entrance gate as well as fortifications belonging to the Philistine settlement [have been found](#).

During the early period of the Iron Age, the Philistines began to extend their rule beyond Philistia and were therefore in constant conflict with the neighboring Israelites. In recent years, some scholars have claimed that Philistine Gath was not a dominant, well-fortified city during the Iron Age IIA (10th–9th centuries), the period immediately after [the separation of the neighboring “United Kingdom” of David and Solomon into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah](#).

This summer, the archaeological team under the direction of Maeir began to excavate in the lower city at Tell es-Safi to investigate whether or not Gath had been fortified in the Iron Age. What they uncovered were the remains of a monumental city gate and large-scale fortifications of the Iron Age city.

Our **free eBook Ten Top Biblical Archaeology Discoveries** brings together the exciting worlds of archaeology and the Bible! Learn the fascinating insights gained from artifacts and ruins, like the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem, where the Gospel of John says Jesus miraculously restored the sight of the blind man, and the Tel Dan inscription—the first historical evidence of King David outside the Bible.



Map of the cities of the Philistine Pentapolis and Jerusalem.

“In the past, we saw evidence of this, but could not find definite proof,” Prof. Aren Maeir told *Bible History Daily*. “Once the remains were found in the specific trench, we ‘connected the dots’ regarding other features we could see on the surface, and then began excavating them as well.”

The archaeological team also uncovered evidence of a metallurgical production area in the Iron IIA city. In previous seasons, the excavation made a number of exciting discoveries that helped paint a picture of life in Philistine Gath, including houses, cultic finds, Philistine burials and [a large horned altar](#) whose dimensions are similar to those given in Exodus 30:2.

“We can also see influences from the Israelite and other local cultures on the Philistines, and Philistine influences on these cultures,” explained Maeir. “For example, while the Philistines have typical pottery, we can see local influences on how it develops and changes, and, similarly, ‘Philistine types’ seem to appear among the Israelites/Judahites, as well. This mirrors the intense and multifaceted connections that existed between the Philistines and their neighbors.”

“While we most often see the Philistines as the main enemies of the Israelites and Judahites, as reflected in the Samson stories in the Bible, it was much more complex,” Maeir said. “On the one hand, they were enemies. On the other hand, they were close neighbors.”